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**Senator
Bob Dvorsky's
Report**

Great Places abound in Iowa

This spring, the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs solicited applications for a new program called Iowa Great Places. The initiative is designed to make good places great by cultivating the unique and authentic qualities that make Iowa's communities, regions, neighborhoods and districts special.

I know that a great quality of life is essential to our economic development, and folks across the state seem to agree. More than 145 Great Places applications poured in from 91 Iowa counties.

Currently, coaches are meeting with each applicant to create a Great Places Profile and develop an offer. I'm really excited at the prospect of the Creative Corridor of Coralville, Iowa City and Cedar Rapids being named one of Iowa's Great Places. Three places will be selected for a pilot project by October 1.

New, quality jobs for Iowans

As we look for ways to attract and maintain jobs in Iowa, we must consider the types of jobs we want to attract. We must go after quality jobs that will bring more people into Iowa and keep younger Iowans in our state. We need companies that will take care of their workers and value their services.

In attracting jobs, we should appeal to companies that will meet their obligations to injured workers through the state's workers' compensation system. These benefits help families get by while the worker recovers and gets back to work. We should not remove the safety net of unemployment insurance. This helps families and communities stay afloat in the event of layoffs and plant closings while the workers search for new jobs.

On this Labor Day weekend, we must honor the sacrifice and pride of our workers. We need to make sure they can earn living wages and benefits that are not discarded in the name of "cutting the cost." Iowa has one of the lowest costs of doing business – the third lowest in the nation, according to a recent study by the Milken Institute.

As the Legislature develops and supports business incentives in an effort to draw more jobs to Iowa, I know that it is only high-quality jobs that will retain our best workers and our new graduates, attract new people, and increase the number of small businesses in our cities and towns.

A high-quality job that can support a family and provide benefits is a key to ensure that Iowa continues to be the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Expanding educational opportunities

The quality and quantity of educational opportunities are becoming more important to attain high-skill, high-wage jobs in the new economy. Business leaders and educators insist that students leave school with the skills necessary to be successful in today's knowledge-based market.



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For the first time in several years, the Legislature took significant steps during the 2005 session to increase our investment in public schoolchildren, particularly supporting student achievement. This includes putting more resources into reducing class sizes and developing a new early childcare initiative to ensure all of Iowa children start school ready to learn.

I was proud of the efforts to maintain our commitment to public education with a 4-percent increase in basic school spending for the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years.

The Legislature also delivered on its commitment to reduce class sizes, a program that has helped to improve student achievement across the state. This program has been credited with stopping the decline in fourth-grade reading scores that we'd seen since 1993.

This year, we also took a giant step toward ensuring that more Iowa students come to school ready to learn. Recognizing that stronger preschool programs are a key to Iowa's educational system, we invested \$20 million to improve preschool programs. The goal is to have a comprehensive, targeted approach to early childhood education that will provide the biggest educational benefit for our investment.

My colleagues and I are starting to put together a list of education priorities for the next session, which starts in January. I'd be interested in hearing your ideas for improving our schools, increasing student achievement and expanding opportunities so our children can start school prepared to learn—and leave school prepared for the high-skill, high-wage jobs in the new economy.